

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES REVIEW TENNESSEE**

The Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) assesses State performance during a specified time period with respect to seven child welfare outcomes in the areas of safety, permanency, and well-being and with respect to seven systemic factors. The assessment is based on information from the following sources:

- The Statewide Assessment prepared by the State child welfare agency – the Tennessee Department of Children’s Services (DCS);
- The State Data Profile prepared by the Children’s Bureau of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services;
- Reviews of 50 cases from three counties in the State; and
- Interviews or focus groups (conducted at all three counties and the State capital) with a wide range of stakeholders including children, parents, foster parents, various levels of State and local DCS personnel, collaborating agency personnel, school personnel, service providers, court personnel, legislators, and attorneys.

A key finding of the review of Tennessee’s child welfare programs is that the State did not achieve substantial conformity with any of the seven safety, permanency, and well-being outcomes. The State did not meet national standards for measures relating to maltreatment of children in foster care, foster care re-entries, the length of time to achieve reunification, the length of time to achieve adoption, or stability of foster care placements.

The most significant concern identified through the onsite review process was the State’s inconsistency in achieving permanency for children in foster care. For example, Permanency Outcome 1—Children have permanency and stability in their living situations—was found to be substantially achieved in only 31 percent of the foster care cases reviewed. Each of the indicators assessed for this item was assigned a rating of Area Needing Improvement, including re-entries of children into foster care (item 5); placement stability (item 6); the appropriateness of the permanency goal for children (item 7); attainment of permanency through reunification, guardianship, or permanent placement with relatives (item 8); and attainment of permanency through adoption (item 9).

One of the identified barriers to attaining permanency was that caseworkers tended to focus on addressing the children’s problems, particularly if there were behavioral problems, with little attention paid to working with families to bring about reunification or working with foster parents to support placements and encourage permanency through adoption or guardianship.

The case review process also found that the child welfare agency was inconsistent with regard to its efforts to preserve children’s continuity of family relationships and connections with community and heritage (Permanency Outcome 2).

In addition, the CFSR identified challenges pertaining to the agency's effectiveness in ensuring the well-being of children and families (Well-Being Outcomes 1, 2, and 3). Indicators rated as Areas Needing Improvement for these outcomes included the following: providing children, parents, and foster parents with the services and supports they need (item 17), involving parents and children in the case planning process (item 18), visiting parents with sufficient frequency to monitor children's safety and promote attainment of case goals (item 20), meeting children's educational needs (item 21), and meeting children's needs for mental health assessments and services.

The State's overall performance with respect to the outcomes pertaining to safety (Safety Outcomes 1 and 2) was higher than its performance in the areas of permanency and well-being. However, the assessment of three of the four indicators assessed for the Safety Outcomes resulted in a finding of "Area Needing Improvement." Concerns were identified with respect to the agency's success in initiating investigations of child maltreatment within the timeframes established by State policy (item 1), the ability of the agency to consistently prevent removal while maintaining children safely in their own homes (item 3); and the effectiveness of the agency in reducing the risk of harm to children (item 4).

Although the State was not in substantial conformity with any of the outcomes, the CFSR did identify areas of strength. One area concerned the recurrence of maltreatment. The State met the national standard for percentage of children who were the subject of a substantiated or indicated maltreatment during the first 6 months of the year, who were the subject of another substantiated or indicated maltreatment report within 6 months. In addition, the indicator pertaining to repeat maltreatment assessed during the case reviews was rated as a Strength. Other indicators rated as a Strength were the following:

- Placing children in close proximity to their biological families (item 11).
- Conducting regular visits with children to monitor their safety and assess their needs and progress with respect to the case plan (item 19).
- Ensuring that children receive appropriate services to meet their physical health needs (item 22).

With respect to the seven systemic factors, the CFSR process determined that the State was not in substantial conformity with factors pertaining to the statewide information system, the case review system, the training efforts for child welfare staff and child caregivers, and the array of services available to families. The State was found to be in substantial conformity with regard to the quality assurance system, agency responsiveness to the community, and foster and adoptive parent licensing, recruitment, and retention.

The following is a summary of the CFSR findings regarding the specific outcomes and systemic factors.

## **KEY FINDINGS RELATED TO OUTCOMES**

### **I. SAFETY**

***Outcome S1: Children are, first and foremost, protected from abuse and neglect.***

#### **Status of Safety Outcome S1 – Not in Substantial Conformity**

Tennessee did not achieve substantial conformity with Safety Outcome 1. Although Tennessee met the national standard with respect to the rate of maltreatment recurrence, 84.6 percent of the cases were rated as having substantially achieved this outcome, which is less than the 90 percent required for substantial conformity. In addition, the State did not meet the national standard for the percentage of children experiencing maltreatment from caretakers while in foster care.

#### **Item 1. Timeliness of initiating investigations of reports of child maltreatment**

Item 1 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. In 71 percent of the applicable cases reviewers determined that DCS responded to child maltreatment reports in a timely manner, but there were concerns related to this issue in 29 percent of the applicable cases reviewed.

#### **Item 2. Repeat maltreatment**

Item 2 was assigned an overall rating of Strength based on the following:

- Only one child experienced two maltreatment incidents within a 6-month period.
- The incidence of repeat maltreatment in FY 2000 as reported in the State Data Profile was 2.8 percent, which is less than the national standard of 6.1 percent.

***Outcome S2: Children are safely maintained in their homes whenever possible and appropriate.***

#### **Status of Safety Outcome S2 – Not in Substantial Conformity**

Tennessee did not achieve substantial conformity with Safety Outcome 2. This determination was based on the finding that the outcome was substantially achieved in 68.4 percent of the cases reviewed, which is less than the 90 percent required for a rating of substantial conformity.

#### **Item 3. Services to family to protect child(ren) in home and prevent removal**

Item 3 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. In 78 percent of the applicable cases reviewers determined that the agency had made diligent efforts to maintain children safely in their homes, but there were concerns related to this issue in 22 percent of the applicable cases. According to the Statewide Assessment, DCS has been aware of the need to improve the provision of services to prevent removal and launched a new program called Family Support Services. It is anticipated that this program, which was fully implemented statewide in February 2002, will improve DCS' performance on this indicator.

#### **Item 4. Risk of harm to child**

Item 4 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. In 71 percent of the applicable cases reviewers determined that DCS had made diligent efforts to reduce risk of harm to children, but there were concerns related to this issue in 29 percent of the applicable cases. A key concern identified was an inconsistency among caseworkers with respect to conducting comprehensive risk/needs assessments, monitoring families on an ongoing basis to ensure children's safety, and assessing change in risk factors prior to reunification.

## **II. PERMANENCY**

*Outcome P1: Children have permanency and stability in their living situations.*

#### **Status of Permanency Outcome 1 – Not in Substantial Conformity**

Tennessee did not achieve substantial conformity with Permanency Outcome 1. This determination was based on the following:

- The State did not meet the national standards for foster care re-entries, stability of foster care placements, reunification within 12 months of entry into foster care, and adoptions within 24 months of entry into foster care.
- 31.0 percent of the cases reviewed were rated as having substantially achieved Permanency Outcome 1, which is less than the 90 percent required for substantial conformity.

#### **Item 5. Foster care re-entries**

Item 5 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement based on the following findings:

- In 75 percent of the applicable cases this item was rated as a strength; however, in 25 percent of the applicable cases reviewers determined that a re-entry into foster care had occurred within 12 months of discharge from a prior episode.
- The State's incidence of foster care re-entry in FY 2000 (as reported in the State Data Profile) is 10.1 percent, which does not meet the national standard of 8.6 percent.

A recent State policy requiring cases to be open for 9 months following reunification is expected to decrease the rate of re-entry into foster care.

#### **Item 6. Stability of foster care placement**

Item 6 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement based on the following findings:

- In 66 percent of the applicable cases reviewers determined that children experienced placement stability, but in 34 percent of the applicable cases reviewers determined that children did not have placement stability and that placement changes were not in the best interest of the child.
- The State Data Profile indicated that 61.1 percent of children in foster care for 12 months or less during FY 2000 had no more than two placement settings, which does not meet the national standard of 86.7 percent.

**Item 7. Permanency goal for child**

Item 7 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. In 59 percent of the applicable cases reviewed reviewers determined that DCS had established appropriate permanency goals for children in a timely manner, but there were concerns regarding appropriateness of permanency goals in 41 percent of the applicable cases reviewed. Of particular concern was the practice of establishing a goal of long term foster care leading to emancipation without exploring alternative goals, such as adoption or guardianship.

**Item 8. Reunification, Guardianship or Permanent Placement with Relatives**

This item was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement based on the following:

- The State Data Profile indicates that the State's percentage for reunifications occurring within 12 months of entry into care is 61.3, which does not meet the national standard of 76.2 percent.
- In 69 percent of the applicable cases reviewers determined that the agency had made diligent efforts to bring about permanency for children with a goal of reunification, permanent placement with relatives, or guardianship, but there were concerns regarding this issue in 31 percent of the applicable cases.

The Statewide Assessment noted that the ability of DCS to provide the intensified and high quality case management necessary for timely reunification has been hindered by the high caseloads that caseworkers carry and the number of children placed in agency custody by the court due to truancy or other "unruly" behavior, which leads workers to focus primarily on meeting children's service needs with respect to improving their behavior problems.

**Item 9. Adoption**

Item 9 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement based on the following:

- In 1 (10 percent) of the 10 applicable cases this item was rated as a strength. In 9 (90 percent) of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that the agency was not engaging in sufficient efforts to achieve finalized adoptions for children in foster care.
- The State Data Profile indicates that the percentage of finalized adoptions in FY 2000 that occurred within 24 months of removal from home (10.5%) is less than the national standard of 32.0.

As noted in the Statewide Assessment, the agency's ability to achieve permanency through adoption has been greatly hindered by the fact that until recently the agency only had 16 attorneys covering all 95 counties.

**Item 10. Permanency goal of other planned permanent living arrangement**

Item 10 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. In 44 percent of the applicable cases reviewers determined that the agency had made diligent efforts to assist children in achieving a permanency goal of other planned permanent living arrangement. However, in 56 percent of the applicable cases reviewers determined that the agency had not made diligent efforts to assist children in attaining more appropriate goals, such as guardianship or adoption, or had not provided the necessary services to support children's eventual emancipation to independent living. The Statewide

Assessment notes that there has been a slight decrease in the number of children with this goal from 2000 to 2001 and anticipates that this decrease will continue.

***Outcome P2: The continuity of family relationships and connections is preserved for children.***

**Status of Permanency Outcome 2 – Not in Substantial Conformity**

Tennessee did not achieve substantial conformity with Permanency Outcome 2. This determination was based on the finding that the outcome was rated as substantially achieved in 37.9 percent of the cases, which is less than the 90 percent required for substantial conformity.

**Item 11. Proximity of foster care placement**

Item 11 was assigned an overall rating of Strength because in 85 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that children had been placed in foster homes that were in close proximity to their parents or, when children were placed out of their communities of origin, the placement was necessary to meet the special needs of the child. As noted in the Statewide Assessment, there is a new agency policy to place children within a 75-mile radius of their community of origin (i.e., where they resided prior to entering foster care).

**Item 12. Placement with siblings**

Item 12 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. In 67 percent of the applicable cases reviewers determined that the agency had made diligent efforts to keep siblings together, but there were concerns regarding placement with siblings in 33 percent of the applicable cases.

**Item 13. Visiting with parents and siblings in foster care**

Item 13 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. In 70 percent of the applicable cases reviewers determined that DCS had made concerted efforts to facilitate visitation, but there were concerns regarding this issue in 30 percent of the applicable cases. The concerns occurred most frequently in the assessment of visitation between children and their siblings.

**Item 14. Preserving connections**

Item 14 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. In 64 percent of the applicable cases reviewers determined that children's connections to family, community, heritage, faith, and friends had been preserved while the child was in foster care, but there were concerns regarding preserving connections in 36 percent of the applicable cases.

**Item 15. Relative placement**

Item 15 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. In 38 percent of the applicable cases reviewers determined the agency had made diligent efforts to locate and assess relatives as potential placement resources, but there were concerns regarding this issue in 62 percent of the applicable cases. The Statewide assessment notes that there

are several issues that contribute to the under utilization of relative placements including the general perspective of Court and DCS staff that relatives should care for children without financial assistance from the State.

**Item 16. Relationship of child in care with parents**

Item 16 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. In 61 percent of the applicable cases reviewers determined that the agency had made sufficient efforts to support or maintain the bond between parents and their children while the children were in foster care, but there were concerns regarding this issue in 39 percent of the applicable cases.

**III. WELL-BEING**

***Outcome WB1: Families have enhanced capacity to provide for their children's needs.***

**Status of Well-Being Outcome 1 – Not in Substantial Conformity**

Tennessee did not achieve substantial conformity with Well-Being Outcome 1. This determination was based on the finding that the outcome was rated as substantially achieved in 52 percent of the cases reviewed, which is less than the 90 percent required for a determination of substantial conformity. A general finding of the CFSR process with regard to this outcome was that DCS is not consistent in its efforts to identify and provide for the service needs of families or to involve them in case planning. There was also evidence of infrequent face-to-face contact between agency workers and the parents in their cases.

**Item 17. Needs and services of child, parents, foster parents**

Item 17 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. In 56 percent of the applicable cases reviewers determined that the needs and services of children, parents, and/or foster parents had been, or were being, adequately addressed by DCS, but there were concerns regarding this issue in 44 percent of the applicable cases. Areas of concern included (1) the adequacy of assessments, particularly with respect to identifying underlying problems such as substance abuse and sexual abuse; (2) inconsistencies in meeting children's and parent's service needs; and (3) a lack of attention in some cases to the service needs of foster parents. One of the key unmet service needs for many adolescents in foster care was the need for services to prepare them for eventual independent living.

**Item 18. Child and family involvement in case planning**

Item 18 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. In 65 percent of the applicable cases reviewers determined that DCS had appropriately involved parents or children in the case planning process, but there were concerns regarding this issue in 35 percent of the applicable cases. This finding is contrary to DCS policy, as stated in the Statewide Assessment, which requires that parents of children in foster care participate in the development of their child's plan.

**Item 19. Worker visits with child**

Item 19 was assigned an overall rating of Strength because in 92 percent of the cases, reviewers determined that the frequency of caseworker visits with children was sufficient to ensure adequate monitoring of the child's safety and well-being. This finding is consistent with information reported in the Statewide Assessment.

**Item 20. Worker visits with parents**

This item was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. In 68 percent of the applicable cases reviewers determined that visits with parents were sufficiently frequent and of sufficient quality to promote the safety and well-being of the child or increase movement toward permanency, but there were concerns related to workers' visits with parents in 32 percent of the applicable cases.

***Outcome WB2: Children receive appropriate services to meet their educational needs.***

**Status of Well-Being Outcome WB2 – Not in Substantial Conformity**

Tennessee did not achieve substantial conformity with Well-Being Outcome 2. This determination is based on the finding that 82.2 percent of the cases reviewed were found to have substantially achieved this outcome, which is less than the 90 percent required for substantial conformity.

**Item 21. Educational needs of the child.**

Item 21 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. In 82 percent of the applicable cases reviewers determined that the educational needs of children were appropriately addressed, but there were concerns related to this issue in 18 percent of the applicable cases.

***Outcome WB3: Children receive adequate services to meet their physical and mental health needs.***

**Status Of Well-Being Outcome 3 - Not in Substantial Conformity**

Tennessee did not achieve substantial conformity with Well-Being Outcome 3. This determination was based on the finding that the outcome was rated as substantially achieved in 69.4 percent of the applicable cases, which is less than the 90 percent required for a determination of substantial conformity. In general, the CFSR found that DCS was not consistent in its efforts to meet children's mental health needs although it was effective in meeting their physical health needs.

**Item 22. Physical health of the child**

Item 22 was assigned an overall rating of Strength based on the finding that in 89 percent of the applicable cases, reviewers determined that DCS was adequately addressing the health needs of children in foster care and in-home services cases.



**Item 23. Mental health of the child**

Item 23 was assigned an overall rating of Area Needing Improvement. In 71 percent of the applicable cases reviewers determined that DCS was effective in meeting children's mental health service needs, but there were concerns related to this issue in 29 percent of the applicable cases.

**KEY FINDINGS RELATING TO SYSTEMIC FACTORS****IV. STATEWIDE INFORMATION SYSTEM****Status of Statewide Information System – Not in Substantial Conformity**

Tennessee is not in substantial conformity with the factor of Statewide Information System.

**Item 24. The State is operating a Statewide information system that, at a minimum, can readily identify the status, demographic characteristics, location, and goals for the placement of every child who is (or within the immediately preceding 12 months, has been) in foster care.**

Item 24 was assigned a rating of Area Needing Improvement because information gathered during the review indicated that the State's information system cannot identify the specific location (foster home) of a child if the child is placed with an agency providing foster care services.

**V. CASE REVIEW SYSTEM****Status of Case Review System – Not in Substantial Conformity**

Tennessee is not in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Case Review System.

**Item 25. Provides a process that ensures that each child has a written case plan to be developed jointly with the child's parent(s) that includes the required provisions.**

Item 25 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement because although DCS has a process in place for a written case plan to be jointly developed by the child and parents, the information gathered during the review indicates that many children and parents are not involved in the development of the case plan.

**Item 26. Provides a process for the periodic review of the status of each child, no less frequently than once every 6 months, either by a court or by administrative review.**

Item 26 was assigned a rating of Strength because information gathered during the review indicates that DCS has a process in place for the periodic review of the status of each child no less frequently than once every 6 months and that these reviews are being conducted in a timely manner.

**Item 27. Provides a process that ensures that each child in foster care under the supervision of the State has a permanency hearing in a qualified court or administrative body no later than 12 months from the date the child entered foster care and no less frequently than every 12 months thereafter.**

Item 27 was assigned a rating of Strength because information gathered during the review indicates that DCS has a process in place to ensure that each child in foster care has a permanency hearing no later than 12 months after the child entered foster care and no less frequently than every 12 months thereafter, and that these reviews are being held in a timely manner.

**Item 28. Provides a process for termination of parental rights proceedings in accordance with the provisions of the Adoption and Safe Families Act.**

Item 28 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement because although DCS has a process in place for termination of parental rights the information gathered during the review indicates that TPR is not being done in all cases in accordance with ASFA.

**Item 29. Provides a process for foster parents, pre-adoptive parents, and relative caregivers of children in foster care to be notified of, and have an opportunity to be heard in, any review or hearing held with respect to the child.**

Item 29 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement because although DCS has a process in place for foster parents, pre-adoptive parents, and relative caregivers to be notified of and have an opportunity to be heard in any review or hearing, the information gathered during the review indicates that parties do not always receive these notices or do not receive them in a timely manner.

## **VI. QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEM**

### **Status of Quality Assurance System-Substantial Conformity**

Tennessee is in substantial conformity with the factor of Quality Assurance System.

**Item 30. The State has developed and implemented standards to ensure that children in foster care are provided quality services that protect the safety and health of the children.**

Item 30 was rated as a Strength because information gathered during the review indicates that the State has developed and implemented standards to ensure that children in foster care are provided quality services that protect the safety and health of children.

**Item 31. The State is operating an identifiable quality assurance system that is in place in the jurisdictions where the services included in the CFSP are provided, evaluates the quality of services, identifies strengths and needs of the service delivery system, provides relevant reports, and evaluates program improvement measures implemented.**

Item 31 was rated as a Strength because information gathered during the review indicates that the State is operating a quality assurance system that evaluates the quality of

services, identifies strengths and needs of the service delivery system, provides relevant reports, and evaluates program improvement measures implemented.

## **VII. TRAINING**

### **Status of Training-Not in Substantial Conformity**

Tennessee is not in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Training.

**Item 32. The State is operating a staff development and training program that supports the goals and objectives in the CFSP, addresses services provided under titles IV-B and IV-E, and provides initial training for all staff who deliver these services.**

Item 32 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement because although DCS has a new training division, stakeholders interviewed during the review indicated that the initial training does not sufficiently prepare staff for the work they are required to perform.

**Item 33. The State provides for ongoing training for staff that addresses the skills and knowledge base needed to carry out their duties with regard to the services included in the CFSP.**

Item 33 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement because stakeholders indicated that many ongoing training needs are not being met for CPS workers in general and in subject areas including substance abuse and cultural competency training.

**Item 34. The State provides training for current or prospective foster parents, adoptive parents, and staff of State licensed or approved facilities that care for children receiving foster care or adoption assistance under title IV-E that addresses the skills and knowledge base needed to carry out their duties with regard to foster and adopted children.**

Item 34 was rated as a Strength because information gathered during the review indicates that the State provides quality training to current and prospective foster and adoptive parents that prepares them to effectively parent children in their care.

## **VIII. SERVICE ARRAY**

### **Status of Service Array-Not in Substantial Conformity**

Tennessee is not in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of service array.

**Item 35. The State has in place an array of services that assess the strengths and needs of children and families and determine other service needs, address the needs of families in addition to individual children in order to create a safe home environment, enable children to remain safely with their parents when reasonable, and help children in foster and adoptive placements achieve permanency.**

Item 35 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement because although the State does have in place an array of services for children and families, the information gathered during the case record review and stakeholder interviews indicate significant gaps in services.

**Item 36. The services in item 35 are accessible to families and children in all political jurisdictions covered in the State's CFSP.**

Item 36 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement because information gathered during the review indicates that all the services are not accessible to children and families throughout the State.

**Item 37. The services in item 35 can be individualized to meet the unique needs of children and families served by the agency.**

Item 37 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement because Stakeholders indicated that services are not adequately individualized to meet the unique needs of children and families served by DCS.

## **IX. AGENCY RESPONSIVENESS TO THE COMMUNITY**

### **Status of Agency Responsiveness To The Community-Substantial Conformity**

Tennessee is in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Agency Responsiveness to the Community.

**Item 38. In implementing the provisions of the CFSP, the State engages in ongoing consultation with tribal representatives, consumers, service providers, foster care providers, the juvenile court, and other public and private child- and family-serving agencies and includes the major concerns of these representatives in the goals and objectives of the CFSP.**

Item 38 was rated as a Strength because information gathered during the review indicates that DCS engages in ongoing consultation with providers and agencies in setting goals and objectives of the child welfare system in the State.

**Item 39. The agency develops, in consultation with these representatives, annual reports of progress and services delivered.**

Item 39 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement because stakeholders indicated that DCS does not adequately consult with external stakeholders in developing annual reports of progress and services.

**Item 40. The State's services under the CFSP are coordinated with services or benefits of other Federal or federally assisted programs serving the same population.**

Item 40 was rated as a Strength because information gathered during the review indicates that the State does coordinate the services provided by DCS with the services of other Federal or federally assisted programs that serve the same population.

## **X. FOSTER AND ADOPTIVE PARENT LICENSING, RECRUITMENT, AND RETENTION**

### **Status of Foster and Adoptive Parent Licensing, Recruitment, and Retention-Substantial Conformity**

Tennessee is in substantial conformity with the systemic factor of Foster and Adoptive Parent Licensing, Recruitment, and Retention.

#### **Item 41. The State has implemented standards for foster family homes and childcare institutions, which are reasonably in accord with recommended national standards.**

Item 41 was rated as a Strength because information gathered during the review indicates that the State has implemented standards for foster family homes and child care institutions which are reasonable in accord with recommended national standards.

#### **Item 42. The standards are applied to all licensed or approved foster family homes or child care institutions receiving title IV-E or IV-B funds.**

Item 42 was rated as a Strength because information gathered during the review indicates that the State applies the standards to all licensed or approved foster family homes or child care institutions receiving title IV-E or IV-B funds.

#### **Item 43. The State complies with Federal requirements for criminal background clearances as related to licensing or approving foster care and adoptive placements and has in place a case planning process that includes provisions for addressing the safety of foster care and adoptive placements for children.**

Item 43 was rated as a Strength because information gathered during the review indicates that the State complies with Federal requirements for criminal background clearances and other processes for addressing the safety of children in foster care and adoptive placements.

#### **Item 44. The State has in place a process for ensuring the diligent recruitment of potential foster and adoptive families that reflect the ethnic and racial diversity of children in the State for whom foster and adoptive homes are needed.**

Item 44 was rated as an Area Needing Improvement because although DCS has a recruitment process in place, stakeholders indicated that the State is not making diligent efforts to recruit African-American, Hispanic, and Sudanese families and there is a general lack of foster homes for children with severe emotional problems, large sibling groups, and adolescents.

#### **Item 45. The State has in place a process for the effective use of cross-jurisdictional resources to facilitate timely adoptive or permanent placements for waiting children.**

Item 45 was rated as a Strength because the information gathered during the review indicates that DCS adoption workers regularly use cross-jurisdictional resources to facilitate timely adoptive or permanent placements for children.